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1999

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Recommended Citation

Aaron, Bob, "Multitalented Students Make Their Mark at Illinois Wesleyan" (1999). *News and Events*. Paper 867.
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April 8, 1999

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Multitalented Students Make Their Mark at Illinois Wesleyan

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--They're following in the footsteps of multitalented personalities like artist-scientist Leonardo da Vinci, statesman-educator-architect Thomas Jefferson, and wartime leader-historian-Nobel Laureate Winston Churchill.

Multitalented students are a trademark of Illinois Wesleyan University. About 143 IWU students 14 percent of the student body have two or more majors.

Mary Kern, a 1997 IWU graduate who was a psychology-business major, said: "Adding a second major gave me a new perspective it also widened my career options. It's also refreshing to be involved in two fields."

"Where I Can Use All My Talents"

Andrew Giordano, IWU class of 2002 and a business administration-economics major (with a minor in Spanish), said: "I came to Illinois Wesleyan because at an Open House [IWU] President [Minor] Myers, [jr.] talked about multitalented students. This is the type of university where I can use all my talents and graduate in four years."

"It is not uncommon for IWU students to major in diverse fields," Myers said, "biology and music, psychology and German, or physics and business administration. IWU students aren't nudged into either-or choices. Instead they are encouraged to pursue multiple interests simultaneously a philosophy in keeping with the spirit and value of a broad liberal arts education."

Options for the Multitalented

A new IWU publication, *Options for the Multitalented*, outlines the university's philosophy about students pursuing eclectic interests.

The Spring 1999 edition of *Illinois Wesleyan University Magazine* profiles multitalented students in a cover story, "Double Vision: Illinois Wesleyan's Amazing Multi-Majors." The story is written by Heather Hahn, a junior majoring in English from Taylorville, Ill.

IWU Dean of Students and Associate Professor of French James D. Matthews said in the magazine article: "If you are a multi-disciplined student, you bring a cross-disciplinary outlook with you into the classroom. These students have an undeniable passion for their interests, and working with such a student is the best gift a professor can have."

Lon Shapiro, assistant professor of computer science, has worked closely with computer-science majors who also have pursued degrees in philosophy, theatre arts, business management, and psychology.

Well-Organized, Mature

"Most of the students who attempt multi-major programs," Shapiro said in the *IWU Magazine* article, "tend to be well-organized and mature about setting priorities. And there is a support system at IWU that helps students in a way that they might not have had before coming to college, and are likely not to see upon leaving here."

Students who pursue multiple majors are prone to exploring creative relationships between different disciplines.

Linking Eclectic Fields

Andy Ritger, IWU class of 1999, is a computer science-music major, with a concentration in composition, along with a minor in mathematics. Computer science and music are fields that "have a great deal in common," according to Ritger, who is from Random Lake, Wis. "When you write computer software or compose music you are building intricate systems with different elements that you have to make fit together."

Kathleen Finn, IWU class of 1999, whose interests are English and religion, was attracted to her multiple majors, in part, by the prestige associated with studying two widely varying fields.

"To future employers and graduate schools," Finn said, "it shows I'm a well-rounded person and shows that I can do more."

Finn sees other advantages to exploring multiple areas of interest, noting: "I feel I'm a better student for doing it. I'm proficient in two areas, rather than one. I made the most of my academic experience."

The Challenge

Jonathan Musch, who will graduate from IWU in 2000, is studying chemistry and history, two subjects that will help him reach his professional goal: a career as a patent attorney. He welcomes the challenge of studying two diverse fields, but concedes it's difficult at times.

"You have to teach yourself to compartmentalize," Musch advises future double-majors. "You have to be able to switch gears and go from a 300-level chemistry course to an upper-level history course. It takes mental dexterity."

Life can be hectic for students with multiple majors. Rashmi Ramchandani, who will graduate from IWU in 2000 with an accounting-psychology major, told *IWU Magazine* readers: "It's one week before finals and I have four papers due next week. I also have to somehow read 15 chapters variously distributed among each of my five classes and complete other homework and papers that have to be turned in before Reading Day. Luckily though, I have roommates who de-stress me just by being them."

Taking a Cue from History

IWU's multitalented students are taking a cue from several historic figures who mastered an eclectic range of interests. For example, Sir William Herschel, a composer and oboist, also was a gifted astronomer who discovered the planet Uranus in 1781. Charles Ives (1874-1954) was a successful businessman and insurance industry executive. However, history ranks Ives as one of America's classic composers.

Sir Edward Heath, England's prime minister from 1970-74, brought his multiple talents--as a statesman, musician, author, and sailor--to IWU in September, 1994. He mingled with many of IWU's multitalented students during his four-day visit. He spoke about politics and world affairs, but he also gave presentations on music, Japanese prints, and sailing. As prime minister, he won the coveted "Admiral's Cup," a sailing honor. Sir Edward, who attended Balliol College, Oxford, on an organ scholarship, capped his IWU visit by conducting the Illinois Wesleyan Civic Orchestra in a concert featuring the music of Brahms, Bruckner, and Dvorak.

Ismail Merchant, another headliner when it comes to multiple interests, visited IWU in 1998. Merchant is best known as one-half of the Merchant-Ivory film making team--a team with credits like "Room with a View," "Remains of the Day," and "Mr. and Mrs. Bridge." However, Merchant also is a gourmet cook, restaurateur, and the author of several cookbooks.

Merchant advised IWU students: "It's important in life to follow your passion. No matter what people say to you, if you have a vision, it is possible."

About Illinois Wesleyan

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, and a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts.

Editor's Note: For copies of *Options for the Multitalented* or the *IWU Magazine* article, "Double Vision: Illinois Wesleyan's Amazing Multi-Majors," call IWU's Office of University Communications at 309/556-3181 or write: IWU Office of University Communications, P.O. Box 2900, Bloomington, Ill. 61702-2900